

Report of the Library Strategic Planning Committee for FY20-21

Introduction

This report summarizes the activities of the Library Strategic Planning Committee (LSPC) for the academic year of 2020/2021. The main task of LSPC for this period was to work on Objective E5 of the library's strategic plan: "Build & maintain effective collaborations with campus partners." The task was carried out by LPSC in several phases. In phase one we searched for journal articles, presentations, blog posts, etc. The purpose was to explore the best practices for effective interdepartmental campus partnerships with an emphasis on collaborations between academic libraries and other campus departments/offices/units. In phase two we distributed a survey to all library employees in order to identify the existing partnerships between Gitenstein Library and other campus units, and to ask for suggestions about potential future partnerships. In the final phase, LSPC members discussed these various materials with the goal of making recommendations to the library dean.

Best practices of effective campus partnerships

Factors for successful and effective partnerships (Seals, 2015):

1) identifying the right partner; 2) mutual understanding and respect; 3) administrative support; 4) sufficient resources (personnel, space, money, etc.); 5) mutual values and goals; 6) an agreed upon, jointly developed memorandum of understanding; 7) adequate planning and preparation; 8) regular, close communication and staff meetings; and 9) periodic assessment and course corrections as needed.

Potential benefits to partnering with non-academic departments:

In a survey of academic librarians (Wainwright & Davidson, 2017), the top three benefits mentioned from partnerships with non-academic departments were a broader awareness of library services (35% percent of respondents mention this), positive reputation (21%), and a better ability to break down campus silos and build relationships (20%). Other benefits included shared funding, higher door counts, and increased referrals. Hernon and Powell (2008) reports that academic librarians cite the following benefits/rationales for partnerships with non-academic campus organizations/offices: "a way for libraries to meet their missions (supporting teaching, learning, and inquiry); serve the entire institution; create new services; promote and improve existing ones; be involved in student learning and the life of the campus; reduce overlap with other campus services; gain more support from the administration; share space and perhaps staff; create multiple points of service (more effective service provision); and increase campus visibility."

Potential disadvantages to partnerships:

Seals (2015) proposes several potential disadvantages/challenges of libraries partnering with non-academic departments: time spent on partnership activities may interfere with “regular” work when library employees are already overloaded with daily duties, committee assignments, and library projects; it can potentially be harder to manage multiple budgets and supervisory lines; partnerships require a different type of coordination and increased communication; some library workers might worry about a loss of flexibility when working with other departments, particularly when both units do not equally share responsibility, credit, and blame.

Collaboration around a category of student need:

Some schools find it beneficial to partner with offices based on student need. For example, libraries may find it useful to collaborate with offices that are dedicated to disability or diversity in order to create stronger connections and ensure that all students are receiving the support they need.

Assessment is essential but often ignored:

In several different academic library surveys, practitioners consistently mention assessment as an important component of collaborative projects, but those publications simultaneously admit that it’s often either not done or any assessment that is done is not sufficiently robust or rigorous.

Partnership examples from other academic libraries

The following four examples are taken from presentations at the VALE conference in 2016 and 2019. Detailed information can be found by following the links provided in the reference section at the end of this report.

1. Hoskins and Kennedy (2016): Since 2015, the reference department of Rowan University Campbell Library has partnered with the campus marketing office and Digital Scholarship Center to develop innovative programming that supports the school’s common reading assignment.
2. Serpico, Davis, & Park (2016): The Kaplan Family Library at Mount Saint Mary College and Rider University Library partner with various campus divisions via outreach activities and marketing materials in order to establish the library as the central place on campus for all research-based activities and programs.
3. Deptula, Kosempel, Kranich, and Marks (2019): The libraries at Berkeley College, Raritan Valley Community College, Rutgers University, and William Paterson University have partnered with campus organizations and offices in order to foster civic engagement and civic literacy initiatives in the campus community.

4. Agostinelli, Ochoa, and Pascale (2019): The library of Middlesex County College partners with other organizations to launch collaborative programming and outreach activities so that it may become a community hub.

Following are the results of a useful survey of academic librarians, conducted by [Wainwright & Davidson \(2017\)](#):

The three most common departments that libraries partner with are:

- writing centers (78%)
- student affairs (57%)
- career services (41%)
- other common partnerships include accessibility resource centers, residence life, academic advising, athletics, fellowship/grant support, and student health & counseling services

Common programming for partnerships:

- events or satellite services sponsored by non-academic departments held in the library
- events hosted by non-academic departments outside of the library with the library as a participant
- workshops offered by the library

Other programming for partnerships:

- host and participate in orientations and resources fairs
- host workshops with academic advisors and administration
- provide referrals to appropriate departments
- offer research assistance to specialized groups
- create displays and exhibits
- provide a home for game nights, wellness programs, and student write-in events
- personal librarian services for athletic departments

Result of the library staff survey

In April 2021, the LPSC conducted a survey via Qualtrics. The survey consisted of three questions:

- 1). Do you (or your unit/department) currently collaborate (on any scale) or have you recently collaborated with any campus organizations? If so, which?
- 2). What potential partnerships/collaborations with campus organizations would you suggest the library engage in? Why?
- 3). Additional comments, questions, etc.

The summaries of survey responses are as follows:

1. Existing partnerships:
 - a. Partnership with the college communication marketing and branding office to provide social media content related to library services and resources on the college website

- b. Partnership with the college conference and meeting services to offer library spaces that can be reserved for meetings
- 2. Potential partnerships:
 - a. Partnership between the library archive and special collection service and the deaf studies program to:
 - i. build relationships with all departments
 - ii. work together on teaching opportunities
 - iii. Partner with the bookstore to compile lists of required readings

In reviewing the survey responses, LSPC noted that there is some degree of complexity surrounding the concept of “campus partners.” In order to draw clearer and more useful conclusions, further information-gathering efforts are necessary. A key aspect of that (time-consuming) work would be to clearly define what is meant by the terminology of the E5 strategic objective, since our survey responses revealed that there are a variety of interpretations and some degree of confusion in regards to such.

Recommendations

LSPC recommends that work on this strategic objective be postponed indefinitely. The current library five-year strategic plan covers the period from 2017 to 2022. It is time to work on a new five year plan. However, as the College is conducting, through an outside consulting firm, its own strategic planning process right now, LSPC decides to wait until the College’s plan comes out. The expected time for that is February 2022.

LSPC recommends that the findings of this report be distributed to Gitenstein Library employees. It would also be appropriate to invite questions and comments sent to LSPC.

References

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- Wainwright, A., & Davidson, C. (2017). Academic libraries and non-academic departments: A survey and case studies on liaising outside the box. *Collaborative Librarianship*, 9(2), 117–134.